BELL & BELMAN

EDUCATION PACKET

OCTOBER 13 - NOVEMBER 19, 2017
THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
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For tour information, contact Viki D. Thompson Wylder at (850) 645-4681

All images and articles in this Teacher's Packet are for one-time educational use only.

All photos of Rodger Belman and dancers were taken at the Nasher Museum at Duke University by J Caldwell.

Top: Rodger Belman dancers, Duke University, 2015
Center: Rodger Belman, Duke University, 2015
Bottom: Rodger Belman dancers, Duke University, 2015
Background: Trevor Bell, Temple Gate, acrylic on canvas, 108" x 162", 1985
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter to the Educator</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography of Trevor Bell</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Emily Hoogerheyde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography of Rodger Belman</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Mya Frieze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences of Trevor Bell</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Emma Clark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences of Rodger Belman</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Diana Robertson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Emma Clark and Diana Robertson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists Related to Trevor Bell</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Nicole Hu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choreographers Related to Rodger Belman</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Nicole Hu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Dance in the Museum</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Samantha Miker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Plans</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking Down Bell &amp; Belman</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Emma Clark, Mya Frieze, Diana Robertson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreating the Work of Trevor Bell</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Gabriella Roman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncovering the Connection Between Dance and Painting</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Emily Hoogerheyde, Nicole Hu, Samantha Miker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core Standards</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with Rodger Belman</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Educator,

This packet was created by the Education Program at the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts as a tool to help you teach your students about the work of Trevor Bell and Rodger Belman. Trevor Bell, a contemporary visual artist, has continued to develop his abstract and "shaped canvas" approach. Rodger Belman, a professor at Florida State University, is a post-modern choreographer, who demonstrates his interest in nature, art, and movement through dance. In this packet, you will find information on this exhibition, *Bell and Belman*, as well as educational material and articles concerning the history of dance in the museum, influences, and themes present in the work of these artists.

We would also like to extend an invitation to you to attend this upcoming exhibition, scheduled for the Fall of 2017. This exhibition will present Trevor Bell’s multi-canvas piece titled *Southern Light* and Rodger Belman’s interpretation of this work through dance. The museum will be offering guided tours and events. For more information about visits and tours, please contact Viki D. Thompson Wylder at (850)-645-4681.

Feel free to use this packet to help prepare students for a visit to the museum or as a part of your regular curriculum. This packet is in accordance with Florida’s Common Core Standards. All images in this packet are for educational use only. We hope this packet will be a helpful tool for you and your classroom.

Sincerely,

Emma Clark  
Mya Frieze  
Emily Hoogerheyde  
Nicole Hu  
Samantha Miler  
Diana Robertson  
Gabriella Roman
Trevor Bell was born in Leeds, England and graduated from the Leeds College of Art in 1952. Soon after, in 1955, he was encouraged to move to West Cornwall, where he rapidly became a leading member of the movement to establish British art on the world stage. During this time, he received the Paris Biennale International Painting Prize as well as an Italian Government Scholarship. In 1960, after being offered the Gregory Fellowship in painting at Leeds, a small stipend that funded his painting at the school without having to teach, Bell moved back to his hometown where he developed his idea for “shaped canvases.” Shaped canvases challenge the traditional, rectangular disposition of paintings and instead assume unique shapes, sometimes losing flatness and becoming three dimensional. These distinguished his work from other abstract artists of his time. Bell's compositions often started with shaped canvases, sometimes joining several different canvases to make one flowing image. He enlisted intense coloration always focusing on an abstract approach as opposed to representational shapes and images.

Over the course of several years, Bell combined his love of teaching and painting and in 1976 he accepted a position as a professor at Florida State University. His art is scattered across Florida’s museums and public spaces in cities like Miami, Orlando, Sarasota, Largo, and even outside Florida in expansive metropolitan areas such as Chicago and New York. Bell's stay in Florida altered his artwork in such a way that it developed external similarities to the mid-century work of abstract expressionist, Mark Rothko. He began to create his “heat scapes” in which the colors appeared warmer and the contrast was sharper, representing Florida’s intense climate. Light Pillar was influenced by the power of the space launch at Cape Canaveral, exemplifying the extent to which Florida affected his artwork.

Bell worked as a professor in America for twenty years before moving back to Cornwall in 1996. Since moving back, Bell's work has been altered to reflect the sharp landscape of the Cornish coast. The colors in much of Bell’s most recent work show that he has deviated from the warm reds and oranges of his “heat scapes” and more frequently found cooler hues that suggest the British climate.
Dancer and choreographer Rodger Belman quite literally stumbled upon dance when he was an undergraduate at George Mason University. He peeked into a theatre while on a bike ride, and saw a modern dance class. The choreographer encouraged him to come back and take a class. Even though he was already 22, a little late to start dancing, the next semester Belman enrolled in ballet and modern dance classes, and thus his dance career began.

While he focuses primarily on dance, Belman is also a visual artist, working with collage, clay, and other art materials. His works are generally of the “functional” variety, rather than those to “hang and frame.” He even uses this in his classes, asking students to create collages as part of discussions about process and the way the formal elements of art relate to dance.

Belman is currently a Professor of Dance at Florida State University, but he has worked with many companies and dance programs throughout his career. These include the companies of Twyla Tharp and Mark Taylor as well as teaching at such institutions as the American Dance Festival, George Mason University, and the Dance Theatre of Harlem. Belman’s focus in dance is to explore movement through the human body. He has said he is primarily interested in “creating with the medium of the body.” Belman’s work is most often inspired by the world around him. He has done several pieces in gardens and other areas of nature, and has worked in gallery spaces as well, letting the art, lighting, and space inform his art.
Trevor Bell's life and work has been heavily influenced by geography. The time he spent in St Ives, Cornwall as a young man placed him at the hub of the British mid-century abstract art movement and exposed him to many abstract artists from whom he received advice and encouragement, especially from Ben Nicholson and Terry Frost. The rocky coastline of Cornwall also provided Bell with literal inspiration as well, influencing the color and composition of many of his early works. Following his move to Tallahassee in the mid-1970s, the climate of Florida would also similarly inspire his paintings: these “heat scapes” feature warm, strong colors and reflect the tropical environment in which he was painting.
When he was in the fourth grade Belman was first exposed to dance. One of his teacher’s friends visited his class to talk about her dance studio and to perform a demonstration. Belman was amazed by the woman’s flexibility as she danced and this amazement stuck with him as he grew older.

Belman’s grandparents directly impacted him. They loved the outdoors, nature, and gardens. This influenced Belman to do “garden projects” in which he would create dances to be performed in gardens. He has implemented these “projects” in various locations in China, Bolivia, and the U.S.

Belman believes he is not directly influenced by other dancers, but there are some dancers whose work he admires and by whom he is inspired. Colleen Thomas, Beth Gill, Jodi Melnick, John Jasperse, and Jesse Zaritt are just a few of these peers. Another influence on Belman is his love of the visual arts. He believes his aunt, who was an artist, helped inspire this interest. Of the visual artists, Trevor Bell and his paintings have influenced Belman, particularly in his teaching. Belman’s students create dances suggested by the movement in Bell’s paintings. This has led the two to collaborate on several occasions. For a complete interview with Rodger Belman, see pages 24-27 in the appendix.
In addition to his response to his environment, Bell’s work is known for several other key characteristics. His intense use of contrasting color is one, as well as an expansive scale, with some pieces measuring as large as 186 x 86 inches. Finally, Bell's use of shaped canvases is also notable; the dynamic contours of his canvases are unframed and these paintings manage to balance both the art on the canvas and the art of the canvas itself. All these themes combine to form the striking and vibrant abstract paintings for which Trevor Bell is known.

Rodger Belman's themes are inspired by pure movement, the mechanics of the moving body, moving bodies in space, the bodies themselves, and space around him. He also references the visual arts, paintings, sculpture, music, films, people, nature, and the dancers with whom he works. The first dances choreographed by Belman included themes of nature, metaphysics, and spirituality. Belman's themes are often about creating through the medium of the body and the process of discovery—seeing, thinking, feeling, and questioning as a guide for being in the moment.
Trevor Bell often differentiates himself with an iconic attribute. He shapes his own canvases. American contemporary artist, Paul Reed (1919-2015), also shaped his own paintings. Molding the canvas shapes gives the work of Bell and Reed energy. Both artists use rigorous color to create vigor and movement through their uniquely defined spaces. The sense of movement within their canvas shapes and compositions can be compared to that of dance, with the artists choreographing the movements of the viewers’ eyes.

Top: Paul Reed, *Margem*, acrylic on canvas, 55" x 44", 1968

Bottom: Trevor Bell, *Temple Gate*, acrylic on canvas, 108" x 156", 1981
Contemporary dance combines and features various dance styles: modern, jazz, lyrical, and classical ballet. Contemporary dancers understand the importance of uniting space and body through versatile movement. Not being required to adhere to any particular structure or style, contemporary dance can be executed to a diverse mixture of musical genres. In his latest work *Remains*, John Jasperse, a contemporary choreographer, created dance movements to coincide with an audience’s collective memory of canonical paintings. Jasperse skillfully articulated the way dance and the visual arts can be interwoven. Rodger Belman, a faculty member at Florida State University’s School of Dance, teaches in the areas of contemporary dance and choreography. Belman likewise interweaves Trevor Bell’s art and its freedom of form with his own movement and his cache of teaching strategies.

The relationship between dance and visual art is growing, expanding the minds and work of dancers, painters, choreographers, and other artists alike. Trevor Bell, painter, and Rodger Belman, dancer and choreographer, both explore vision and movement. The paintings of Trevor Bell suggest the movement of Rodger Belman’s dance. The dance of Rodger Belman suggests the lines, shapes, and colors of Bell’s canvases.
The rich history of dance and visual art demonstrate mutual influence, from Degas’s masterful study of ballerinas at the end of the nineteenth century to the unruly experimentation of the Dada Movement in the early twentieth century. In the 1960s, the radical developments of the Judson Dance Theater moved dance performance into the category of modern art. These experiments culminated in the choreographed descent of a harnessed dancer down the side of a SoHo building in New York – an act more akin to art performance of the time than contemporary dance.

In 1964, with Museum Event No. 1 at Vienna’s Museum of the Twentieth Century, Merce Cunningham inaugurated the trend of dance performance within museum exhibition spaces. More than 800 similar performances followed, in locations like the ruins of Persepolis in Iran, and in front of artworks by Andy Warhol. Since 2002, Dancing Museums has continued Cunningham’s practice by exploring new ways of engaging audiences in art spaces and promoting dance as an inclusive art. Dancing Museums is an organization of five European dance companies that complete residencies at museums and produce choreographic guided tours, solo dances based on artworks, and participatory workshops. For example, in March 2016, Dancing Museums completed a residency at The Louvre in Paris and the Mac Val Contemporary Arts Museum in Vitry-sur-Seine. At the Mac Val, a dance entitled Please Do Not Destroy was performed which explored the value of the arts as a source of collective imagination and trigger for transformation. At the Louvre, dancers took inspiration from a work that belongs to the cultural heritage of modern-day Iraq and Syria. Excerpts from these works can be viewed through this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ND1lvk0rZDQ.

Meanwhile, museum interest in dance has resulted in unique curatorial offerings. In 2010, an exhibition at the Southbank Centre in London aimed to celebrate the moment in the 1960s when artists began exploring the world through their bodies as well as through their eyes. The exhibition invited visitors to become participants – or even dancers – in installations or in relationship to sculptural work. For example, William Forsythe’s The Fact of Matter (2009) encouraged the audience to become dancers by allowing them to swing and clamber through a forest of gymnast rings. Resident dancers also appeared in impromptu performances throughout the galleries, sometimes presenting landmark dance works from the 1960s, recreating performance art, or interacting with the contemporary works installed in the museum.
LESSON PLANS

Breaking Down Bell & Belman
Elementary School - Grades K-5
By Emma Clark, Mya Frieze, Diana Robertson

Recreating the Work of Trevor Bell
Middle School - Grades 6-8
By Gabriella Roman

Uncovering the Connection Between Dance and Painting
High School - Grades 9-12
By Emily Hoogerheyde, Nicole Hu, Samantha Miker
Top: Trevor Bell, St. Ives, 1958
Bottom: Rodger Belman and dancers, Duke University, 2015
Background: Trevor Bell, *Rising Heat*, acrylic on canvas, 186" x 86", 1982
Grade Levels: K-5  Lesson Length: 1-2 Class Sessions

MATERIALS:
Printed image of Bell's painting (image included; cropped with no border)
6”x 8” blank pieces of paper (also marked 1-25)
crayons
Instrumental music (optional)

KEY OBJECTIVE:
Rodger Belman dancers rehearsing in an art gallery for a performance.

Each student will recreate a section of a gridded Trevor Bell work. The student-created Trevor Bell segments will be reassembled and displayed on a classroom wall. Students will then observe a choreography demonstration, based on the Trevor Bell piece, given by dance students. The lesson will conclude with the creation of choreography as a class in front of the art piece displayed, teaching the students about dance and allowing them to work in collaboration similar to that between Trevor Bell and Rodger Belman.

PRIOR TO LESSON (teacher only):

1. Print the image of Trevor Bell’s Windover painting and create a grid that allows all students in the class to recreate a section. Gridded segments are suggested to be 1.5” vertically x 2” horizontally.
2. Number each segment (1-25) to make reassembly and installation easier.
3. Cut out segments so that each student can reproduce a section.
4. Contact the FSU Dance Department to request dance students to come to the class on the second day of the lesson.
PAINTING:
Materials: printed image of Trevor Bell’s painting (image included; cropped with no border), 6” x 8” blank pieces of paper (also marked 1-25), crayons
1. Teacher will assign each student a section of the Trevor Bell painting to recreate on a 6”x 8” piece of paper (size may be adjusted based on class size and/or available wall space; listed dimensions call for 30” x 40” of wall space). The number on the back of the painting segments and the number on the back of the blank papers should match for each student.
2. Students will color a recreation of a section.
3. Using the marked numbers as a guide to placement, the individual sections will be assembled on the classroom wall to create a large-scale reproduction of the Trevor Bell painting.

DANCING:
Materials: instrumental music (optional)
1. Dance students invited to the class will give a brief demonstration of choreography by creating a dance based on the assembled Trevor Bell painting on the classroom wall.
2. Dancers will explain the relationship between their movements and the Trevor Bell image.
3. Once the dancers have completed their dance, students will join them in their movement. Ask dancers to encourage students to suggest movements based on the Bell work.
4. After the dance is completed, students will discuss the way the painting influenced the dance.

Evaluation: Did the students understand the relationship between the movement in Trevor Bell’s painting and the movement within the choreographic choices of the dancers? Were the students able to suggest physical movements based on the Trevor Bell composition?

Trevor Bell Image:

Trevor Bell, *Windover Sixteen*, acrylic on canvas, 60” x 96”, 2014
RECREATING THE WORK OF
TREVOR BELL

By Gabriella Roman

Grade Levels: 6-8  Lesson Length: 1-2 Class Sessions

MATERIALS:
White paper or cardstock
Watercolor, crayons, or colored pencils
Scissors

KEY OBJECTIVE:

Trevor Bell was influenced by the local landscapes and environments in which he lived during different periods in his life. When Bell lived in Florida, works such as Light Pillar and Rising Heat demonstrated his interest in the bright light and weather of this area, but also the space program located in the state. Light Pillar depicts a burst of light and bright color against a blue sky, capturing the energy and power of a space launch. Students will research/look at various images of ecological systems with their accompanying landscapes. Then each student will choose an image of a landscape or specific location, for example, a forest, the coast, desert, tundra, or grassland. The images of landscapes can include human activity or evidence of human activity. Each student will then abstractly express a chosen landscape through use of the art elements, especially color, with a sense of movement and no distinct representational forms. Students can also create their own versions of Bell’s “shaped canvas.” They can use scissors to shape the paper material to mimic Bell’s unique canvases.

PROCEDURE:

1. Students will discuss the influences of landscape on Trevor Bell's work after viewing examples of his work in relationship to landscape.
2. Discuss the formal elements, line, shape, space, color, texture, value, that Bell incorporates to express his environments.
3. Each student will choose a photo of a landscape and will think about the art elements and movement represented in the photo.
4. Students can shape their canvases, as Trevor Bell did, by trimming areas of their paper.
5. Each student will express the elements and movement of this chosen landscape on paper with colored pencils, watercolor, or crayons.
6. Students will then discuss the way their works express the landscapes they chose.
Discussion Questions:
1. How does Trevor Bell's *Light Pillar* and *Rising Heat* express the Florida landscape? How does Trevor Bell's *Bernina* and *Small Juggler* express the mountains and the coast?
2. What elements can be employed to express landscape? What elements did Trevor Bell use in *Bernina*?
3. How can something be expressed without representational form?

Evaluation:
1. Were students able to express landscapes with an emphasis on the art elements and a sense of movement without using representational forms?
2. Were the students able to use Trevor Bell’s works as an influence on their landscape production?

Example of a "shaped canvas:"
Trevor Bell, *Light Trap*, acrylic on canvas, 120" x `168", 1981
First Row, Left: Trevor Bell, *Bernina*, oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 1962
Right: Photograph taken by Bell while trekking in Zanska on one of three Himalayan trips
Second Row, Left: Trevor Bell, *Small Juggler*, acrylic on canvas, 33.5" x 21", 1992
Right: *Blowhole* by Dominick Tyler from his book *Uncommon Ground*
Left: Trevor Bell, *Rising Heat*, acrylic on canvas, 186” x 86”, 1982

Right: Florida Sunrise

Left: Trevor Bell, *Light Pillar*, acrylic on canvas, 186” x 86”, 1982

Right: The night launch of Voyager 2 (1977), from Cape Canaveral, Florida. Image c/o NASA/JPL
UNCOVERING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN
DANCE AND PAINTING

By Emily Hoogerheyde, Nicole Hu, Samantha Miker

Grade Levels: 9-12  Lesson Length: Two Class Sessions

MATERIALS:
Canvas or other suitable paper
Acrylic paint
Brushes and/or drawing tools

Images to display for class:
Pablo Picasso, Guernica, 1937
Trevor Bell, Quartet, 1974

Links to dance performances:
Trevor Bell, Quartet, acrylic on canvas, 96" x 155", 1974
Asaltos de la Danza en el Museo Reina Sofia 2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ts12LofRoTg (0:25 - 1:25)
Rodger Belman and Dancers: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNCb3lusijw&t=12s (0:30 - 1:30)

KEY OBJECTIVE:

Trevor Bell's and Rodger Belman's exhibition belongs to a tradition of collaboration between visual artists and dance. After exploring the possibilities of art and dance collaboration with Pablo Picasso's Guernica and a performance by dancer Josue Ullate, the students will attempt to draw connections between Trevor Bell's Quartet and a performance choreographed by Rodger Belman. In the next class session, students will be asked to produce their own abstract paintings based on dance performances of their choice.
PROCEDURE:

Class Session I:
1. Introduce Pablo Picasso’s Guernica to the class and have an open discussion about its visual and thematic qualities.
2. Present the video, Asaltos de la Danza en el Museo Reina Sofia 2014, to the class.
3. Begin a discussion about the fusion of artwork and dance present in the video.
   ○ What is your first impression of the dance performance?
   ○ What theme is the dancer conveying through his work?
   ○ What connections exist between Guernica and the dance performance?
   ○ How does the dance performance compare and contrast to the original viewing of the artwork by itself?
   ○ How do you think the artwork influenced the dancer/choreographer?
   ○ Does the dance performance change the way you think about Guernica?
4. Display Trevor Bell’s Quartet for the class. Then, present the video, Rodger Belman and Dancers.
5. Discuss the way Belman’s style connects to Bell’s artwork.
   ○ How does Belman’s style emphasize elements of Bell’s abstract art?
   ○ On what themes might Belman choose to focus?
   ○ How can Belman’s choreography change the way we would traditionally view Bell’s art in a museum setting?
6. For homework, ask the students to find a link to a dance performance they enjoy. It can be from any genre. Suggest looking at Youtube videos from So You Think You Can Dance to brainstorm ideas.

Class Session II:
Using their art supplies, have the students produce abstract paintings in the style of Trevor Bell. These should be inspired by the dance performances they chose for homework.

Class Session III:
Ask students to share videos with the class and to show their own works explaining the connection between them.

EVALUATION:
Were the students able to successfully recognize connections between dance and visual art? Were they able to incorporate elements from dance performances and translate them into abstract visual art?
Elementary K-5:

VA.K.S.1.1
Explore art processes and media to produce artworks.

DA.K.F.1.1
Create free-form dances, using manipulatives, which are personally pleasing and show exploration and imagination.

VA.1.H.3.1
Identify connections between visual art and other content areas.

VA.1.C.2.2
Use various media or techniques to learn how changes affect the completed artwork.

DA.2.O.3.1
Use movement to interpret feelings, stories, pictures, and songs.

VA.2.H.3.1
Describe connections made between creating with art ideas and creating with information from other content areas.

DA.3.O.3.1
Translate words, pictures, or movements into dance to express ideas or feelings.

VA.3.F.3.2
Collaborate to complete a task in art.

DA.4.F.1.1
Collaborate with others to create dance pieces that show innovative movement options.

VA.4.F.3.2
Collaborate with peers in the art room to achieve a common art goal.

DA.5.H.3.1
Create a dance, inspired by another art form, which shows one or more connections between the two disciplines.

VA.5.C.1.2
Use prior knowledge and observation skills to reflect on, analyze, and interpret exemplary works of art.
Middle School 6-8:

VA.68.C.1.1
Apply a range of interests and contextual connections to influence the art-making and self-reflection processes.

VA.68.O.1.1
Make connections between the structural elements of art and the organizational principles of design to understand how artwork is unified.

VA.68.S.1.1
Manipulate content, media, techniques, and processes to achieve communication with artistic intent.

VA.68.S.2.1
Organize the structural elements of art to achieve artistic goals when producing personal works of art.

VA.68.O.1.4
Create artworks that demonstrate skilled use of media to convey personal vision.

VA.68.S.1.2
Use media, technology, and other resources to derive ideas for personal art-making.

High School 9-12:

DA.912.C.1.1
Research and reflect on historically significant and/or exemplary works of dance as inspiration for creating with artistic intent.

DA.912.H.3.1
Compare the creative processes used by a choreographer with those used by other creative individuals, noting the connections in the way they conceive, create, and/or present their work.

VA.912.C.1.1
Integrate curiosity, range of interests, attentiveness, complexity, and artistic intention in the art-making process to demonstrate self-expression.

VA.912.S.3.1
Manipulate materials, techniques, and processes through practice and perseverance to create a desired result in two- and/or three-dimensional artworks.

VA.912.C.1.2
Use critical-thinking skills for various contexts to develop, refine, and reflect on an artistic theme.

VA.912.C.2.2
Assess the works of others, using established or derived criteria, to support conclusions and judgments about artistic progress.

VA.912.S.2.2
Focus on visual information and processes to complete the artistic concept.

VA.912.S.2.5
Demonstrate use of perceptual, observational, and compositional skills to produce representational, figurative, or abstract imagery.
APPENDIX

Interview with Rodger Belman by Gabriella Roman
Page 27

Bibliography
Page 31

Images
Page 32

Evaluation
Page 34
Top: Rodger Belman and dancers, Duke University, 2015
Bottom: Trevor Bell, Cornwall studio, 2008
Background: Trevor Bell, Dance Series 6, acrylic on paper, 27" x 29", 2014
1. How long have you been dancing, and what inspired you to begin in the first place? What moved you to this profession?

I’ve been dancing now for a pretty long time, for more than half of my life. I did start dancing while I was in college, pretty late, dancing in modern and ballet at 22. I was finishing my BA in French at George Mason University in the suburbs of Washington DC. I had gone biking one afternoon into DC and I stopped by the university theatre on the campus of George Mason to get water from the fountain in the theatre lobby. I heard Hall & Oates coming from the theatre so I peeked in to see what was going on and there were dancers on stage and a choreographer sitting in the audience who was running the rehearsal. She was a professor at GMU and ran her own company in Washington DC. She invited me to come in and watch and I asked “What is this?” One of the dancers on stage said it was modern dance. During that interaction with the choreographer and the dancers, the choreographer suggested that I come back and take a class some time at the university. That summer I took “Beginning Modern Dance” and “Beginning Ballet” in that same exact space because the school was in the process of building a new dance building. I actually took a class on that stage that summer. I kind of got hooked, I thought it was really cool, so I put my French degree on hold and started taking dance classes.

2. Obviously you have received many accolades and have worked extensively in the field of dance and performance art. Is there anything you feel should be included in a biography that can’t be found on your résumé?

The fact that I started so late. It’s not unheard of for dancers to start in college, but I was probably older because I had a couple of false starts. By the time I got settled down at George Mason, I was already 22 and I found dance. Also, I am secretly a visual artist of sorts, maybe more of the arts and crafts variety than fine art. I love collaging, making paper, and I’ve done some painting. Mostly nothing to hang and frame. I made works that you can step on or play with, such as a large checkerboard with clay checkers. Collaging is something I do more often, I even use it in my dance composition class as one of the first exercises in the beginning of the semester with grad or undergrad students. This activity is sort of the precursor to our discussion about process and considering the elements and principles of art and design and how they relate to dance making moves.

3. Did anyone from your childhood influence your work today?

Not in a direct way, as in dancer to dancer or choreographer to choreographer. I don’t even remember seeing dance when I was younger, at least not exactly. I never registered that it was something I wanted to do. Although, when I was in elementary school, in the fourth grade, my homeroom teacher invited her friend to come to our class to tell us about her dance studio in Virginia (where Belman was born and raised). I’m sure she came to drum up business, but she did a demonstration for the class. What
impressed me and stuck with me, even until now, was her flexibility. I don’t really remember anything she did, but she folded in half, and I was like “wow, that’s so cool! I want to do that!” I went home and asked my parents if I could take dance, and for whatever reason they said no and I was totally fine with that. I wasn’t that eager to study dance at that time, but I guess that stuck with me (the flexibility), because even today my students sometimes tease me about having no hamstrings because I’m kind of flexible. There were other influences that may have inspired the work that I do. My grandparents had a real love for the outdoors, nature, gardens, and growing things. I do a lot of “garden projects” where I create dances in gardens and I’ve done this in a couple of places in the US, China, Bolivia. That would be a direct influence. Another inspiration would be my love and appreciation for visual arts. I had an aunt, who was an artist. I’m sure that influenced my own interest in visual arts, or at least arts and crafts. It just occurred to me with these questions that my grandparents loved nature and I learned a lot about the outdoors from them, that I’m making these works outside or these connections with visual arts.

4. Do you think there is one underlying theme in your work? Are there multiple themes that can be found in your different projects? Where do you find your inspiration? What inspires your choreography? Are there any choreographers who inspire your work?

I’m interested in coming from a place that’s pure movement, like the mechanics of the moving body, moving bodies in space, drawing inspiration from the bodies in front of me, and then the space around me. I’m interested in creating through the medium of the body and that discovery. I guess this comes up in every process, this idea of discovery and questioning “What if?” and “Why not?” which goes back to process. The process of discovery, seeing, thinking, feeling, and questioning as I go along. That sort of guides me to the work and being in the moment. I’m inspired by the space around me, visual arts, painting, sculpture, music, film, people, nature, the moving body, and the dancers I work with inspire me. The first dances I made have themes of nature, metaphysics, spirituality. There are a lot of choreographers that inspire me, like Trisha Brown, John Jasperse, Jodi Melnick. Their invention of movement, their use of space, lighting, strong visual elements, such as set design. My peers inspire me too.

5. In our research we found the definition of contemporary dance varies greatly between choreographers. How do you define contemporary dance? Is that the way you identify your work? Did you have any role models who did this type of work when you first started out? Do you still have any today?

I guess I’m trying to figure that out too. I think at one time, contemporary dance and modern dance were sort of used interchangeably. I guess I’ve always been more inclined to consider the works that I do modern or postmodern or even post-post-modern really. I then think of contemporary and it being
sort of present day, not bound into one of the codified techniques like those of the modern dance pioneers like Graham, but I guess their works would have been considered contemporary at the time. It’s tricky. I would even lean away from labeling it at all. I think about the phenomenon and popularity of dance on TV. I feel like that label “contemporary” has been assigned to some of the dance we’ve seen, like So You Think You Can Dance. I wonder if in some ways it might be that it is more aligned with narrative dance, this hyper-performance value, more spectacle in a way, very frontal in its presentation, usually seen on stage or competition dance, but there’s this virtuosity about it driven by emotion, narrative, or music. More often than not there is a strict musical structure. Modern dance or post/post-post modern might allow for the inclusion of forms that are more abstract, nonlinear, conceptual, minimal. In terms of visual arts, I would think of a Rothko, Stella, Pollock. It makes me think of the dance movement of the 60’s when choreographers challenged and questioned the notion of what dance was or wasn’t. They challenged the structure or constructs of modern dance and explored even non-dance or pedestrian movements as dance. I always thought of myself as a modern dancer, that was my training, that’s what we called it when I started training, even if it were post-modern, or wasn’t aligned with Martha Graham. It was a few generations away but we still called it modern. At FSU we refer to what we teach there as contemporary and that’s been on the books for a while.

6. There are other choreographers/dancers who are prominent in your generation; which of your peers would you say have a strong influence and/or impact on your work? Have you collaborated with any of them?

More often than not, I collaborate with dancers, composers, or another visual artist, not really a choreographer. I do have peers with whom I work, but, I’m not sure they influence me, maybe in an indirect way that I admire. Colleen Thomas, Jodi Melnick, John Jasperse, and Jesse Zaritt, come to mind. I appreciate their work.

7. What was inspiring about Trevor Bell’s work? How do you plan on incorporating his work into your performance? Will the performance be in person at the museum or through media? What is the process of choreographing a performance that incorporates contemporary painting?

I saw Trevor’s work for the first time when I moved to Tallahassee to join the faculty at FSU. It was in the Spring of 2014, I think. There was an exhibition with 8 or 9 works hanging. I was immediately drawn to his use of color, unique canvas shapes, abstract graphic design, the drama, the dynamics, and the movement of his work. I found them evocative and sensuous. There was a visceral connection. Then I learned about his process. I was doing research on him, and felt a real kinship to him and his creative process, and how important his process is to the work. He talks about being the middle-man, a conduit, which I relate to, not wanting to illustrate or represent, necessarily, but the finished product is what it is. He would say that it is it, not the illusion of it. I have a similar approach
to my dance-making. It doesn’t necessarily come from a narrative nor is it representative of anything. I took my students to see the exhibit and then did a project with all my composition classes, taking them to the museum and working with the elements/principles of art/design and relating that to the dance-making process. I went back with a colleague and then she and I made a short duet in the space, which we videotaped. I gave us each a task in which we responded to the painting in the gallery. Then we created some movement phrases that we repeated in the space together, relating to each other, which we shaped as we moved along. It ultimately became a short duet. I shared this with Allys, the museum director, who encouraged us to share with Bell, which he loved. At the end of the summer I was asked to create a dance for the FSU School of Dance for our Evening of Dance in the fall. We spoke to Trevor about the possibility of collaboration. There was an immediate connection. It was easy to talk and share ideas, and we also seemed to like each other. It was wonderful. I ended up creating two works for that production, one was a main stage work and the other was a pre-concert performance using Bell’s paintings. I called it The Trevor Bell Project. We hung 8 of Bell’s paintings in our black-box space in Montgomery Hall. We set it up like a gallery space. The audience was free to move along through the gallery and dancers.

For the piece for the stage, Bell sent me photographs of his Windover series. He allowed me to use those photographs to create a film that became the backdrop for the piece we did on the stage. There were close-ups of the paintings, zoomed in to pick up texture. It moved slowly behind the dancers, almost imperceptibly. Bell also created some works on paper for this collaboration. We were talking one week about the piece and I shared videos with him throughout the process. One afternoon he directed me to his website. He said to take a look at “Exhibitions” then look at the “Waterhouse & Dodd Exhibition.” He then pointed out a work—a black & white line drawing. He then asked “would something like that serve your purposes? I have some big pieces of paper out in the studio. Maybe I’ll do some drawings this weekend.” He ended up doing a series of 9 works on paper, which he called the Dance Series. We used one of them in the film for the projection.

This past summer I went to the UK to do some research for another grant. While I was there I went to Cornwall to meet Trevor Bell in person. It was my first time meeting him and he was having an exhibit at the time of his newest works. He also included in that exhibit the Dance Series on paper that he did for us. We talked about showing the film projection there, but that didn’t happen. His studio is filled with paintings, he is so prolific. There must be thousands of paintings.

For the fall, I will create a movement vocabulary responding to those Bell paintings and look at the elements/principles of design. Also I plan to look at the way they make myself or the dancers feel, connecting our own experiences. The process would begin with seeing and observing what is in front of us and then exploring it. We’ll probably include the film I made. One of the other pieces that will be included is the Time and Tides work we made for the theatre space in the fall. Right now I’m in the process of turning that dance of 10 into a trio, then putting that trio in the gallery space.
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- http://trevorbellartist.com/
- http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/02/arts/design/paul-reed-painter-of-the-washington-color-school-dies-at-96.html?_r=0
- http://www.dwigmore.com/reed_exhibit.html
- http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/contemporary_art/background1.html

History of Dance in the Museum:
- http://move.southbankcentre.co.uk/microsite/.

Lesson Plan - Breaking Down Bell & Belman:
- http://trevorbellartist.com/

Lesson Plan - Recreating the Work of Trevor Bell:

Lesson Plan - Uncovering the Connection Between Dance and Painting:
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ts12LoRoTg (0:25 - 1:25)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNCb3lusijw&t=12s (0:30 - 1:30)
Early Works

Trevor Bell, *Split Jet*, acrylic on canvas, 89" x 172", 1970

Trevor Bell, *Axe*, acrylic on canvas, 80" x 80", 1968

Florida Works

Trevor Bell, *Yellow Centre*, acrylic on canvas, 90" x 168", 1981

Trevor Bell, *Radial with a Counterweight*, acrylic on canvas, 78" x 174", 1985
Return to Cornwall

Trevor Bell, *Cliff Strata*, acrylic on canvas, 74" x 71", 1995

Trevor Bell, *Sea Cliff*, acrylic on canvas, 76" x 60", 2001

Dance Series

Trevor Bell, *Dance Series 2*, acrylic on paper, 27" x 39", 2014

Trevor Bell, *Dance Series 3*, acrylic on paper, 27" x 39", 2014
EVALUATION

Please return to:
FSU Museum of Fine Arts
Room 250 Fine Arts Building
Tallahassee, FL 32306-1140

Was this material adaptable for introduction to your students?

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Did you feel the packet adequately provided the information and materials on the topics raised by the exhibition?

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Was the packet presented in an organized manner?

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Would you like to continue to receive materials from the FSU Museum of Fine Arts?

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